

Choosing A Web Hosting

Microfinance Empowers

Join us in enabling the poorest of
the poor to improve their own
lives

www.GrameenFoundation.org

Public Service Ads by Google

Once you have created a website you must choose how to get it on the internet. You have 3 main options:

1. Host the site on your computer
2. Host the site on a dedicated server
3. Get someone else to host the site

The first two are only realistic options for big businesses or people with fast dedicated lines. Keeping a web server running is difficult and needs constant monitoring. You will require a fast connection (multiply the number of simultaneous users by their average connection speed (usually 56Kbps and you will see how fast it should be.

Much easier is using a web hosting company. They will put your site on their server using their connection. You will have access via FTP to upload your files and will be able to change your website at any time. This is the way most people get their websites online. There are three main types of hosting: free, paid and dedicated.

Dedicated hosting is when your website is hosted by the company on their sever with their connection. It is expensive and is only really a good idea for big websites. The other options are free and paid hosting.

Free Or Paid?

A lot of people think, "Why should I pay for web hosting if I can get it free?" This is a very good question. Paying for you web hosting has several advantages over free hosting:

You will probably get better features in your hosting package Technical support is usually faster and better They have better connections to the internet and your site will be more reliable They will try their best to please you as you are a paying customer They will not place a banner advertising their services on your page

As always there are exceptions to this. There are some free web hosts which don't place a banner on your page (but their service and features are not usually as good) and some free web hosts have excellent features and reliability (but awful technical support). Even some paid hosts will give you bad service.

Like most things, you get what you pay for. You will never get as good hosting from a free web host as from a paid one but if you are building a site for fun or a small commercial site, free hosting is the best option.

Features

Web hosts will offer you hundreds of different features. I will try to explain some of them so that you know what you need:

- **URL/Address:-** This is only important if you don't have your own domain name. Do you want <http://www.ahost.com/bigword/longnumber/you/> or <http://yourname.host.com> (a subdomain).
- **Space:-** Most websites take up very little space a web page with all its graphics is about 35KB. As you can see from this 5MB will be sufficient for small sites (it will take over 100 pages). If you are making a graphics intensive site or planning to have downloads you might need 15 or 20MB. Some hosts offer unlimited space but this is not really much use.
- **Bandwidth/Transfer:-** This is quoted monthly. It is the total amount of files which can be transferred in a month from your site. You should get at least (1GB/month) unless you have a very small site. Unlimited bandwidth is quite common here.
- **CGI-BIN:-** If you want to run interactive scripts (counters, form-to-mail, guestbooks etc.) you will need a CGI-BIN. You can get these scripts remotely hosted (like the ones from CGI For Me) but they will carry advertising for the site which provides them.
- **SSI:-** This is a special function which allows you to tell the server to include something on your page. It could be some text or some CGI generated code. It is not an option you should need for a small or medium site.
- **MySQL/PHP/ASP Support:-** These are database formats. If you are planning to include a database on your site you will need this. Major sites are often generated dynamically using ASP.
- **Technical Support:-** What happens if you have a problem? How quickly can you get help? You should get at least e-mail technical support. Phone and fax support is good and should be offered by a paid host.
- **E-mail:-** Most hosts will redirect e-mail for you (especially if you have a domain name). Watch out for ones offering POP3 mail. This will allow you to actually connect to their server to get your messages which is better than redirection.
- **FrontPage Extensions:-** If you use Microsoft FrontPage to make your site and want to make use of the FrontPage Components (like search) you will need these.
- **SSL/Secure Server:-** You will need this if you want to have secure ordering on your website.
- **Statistics/Log Files:-** These will give you information about your users. What files are downloaded? What pages are accessed? The server logs will tell you.
- **FTP Accounts:-** These allow you to access you website to upload files. If you have anonymous FTP, users can log into an area of your site to download files.

As you can see some sites will need all these features and some will need very few.

How Much?

As I stated before, free web hosting is free as long as you display their banners (although there are some exceptions). Luckily most will let you upgrade your hosting to ad-free hosting for a small monthly fee. This will let you find a good web host and then get rid of the banners on it. Some also offer better technical support etc. with your upgraded plan.

Paid hosting will usually cost between \$5 and \$75 per month. Dedicated servers will usually cost you over \$150 per month.

What Should I Ask?

There are a few questions you should ask a web host, especially if you are going to pay them. You should always ask for a list of some of the sites hosted by them (if they don't have a list on their site). Visit some of these sites and e-mail the owners asking what they think of the hosting service. If you are not sure if something on your site will be supported or allowed by the host then ask them. They are there to help you.

The speed they answer your questions is important as well. If they can't reply quickly to a potential customer, what will their technical support be like?

Read The Terms and Conditions

This is just a quick reminder to always read the terms and conditions. It has been known for free web hosts to claim the ownership of the copyright of your pages or not allow you to put your own advertising on the site! There may be special restrictions on what you can or cannot have on your site.